

NYGC Research Update

The National Youth Gang Center is providing updates on two evaluations of programs that address gang activity. The first of these studies was an evaluation of the Gang Resistance Education And Training (G.R.E.A.T.) Program. A previous evaluation of G.R.E.A.T. found that the nine-week program produced some noteworthy positive results but did not reduce gang joining. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives undertook a comprehensive revision of G.R.E.A.T., and the revised curriculum was introduced in 2003 in a 13-lesson format. It is a skills-based curriculum designed to produce knowledge and attitudinal and behavioral changes through the use of facilitative teaching, positive behavior rehearsal, cooperative and interactive learning techniques, and extended teacher activities. It consists of thirteen 30- to 45-minute lessons designed to be taught in sequential order by a uniformed law enforcement officer who is specially trained to teach the entire course. The G.R.E.A.T. Program has three primary goals: (1) teach youths to avoid gang membership; (2) prevent violence and criminal activity; and (3) assist youths in developing positive relationships with law enforcement.

In 2006, the National Institute of Justice awarded a five-year grant to the University of Missouri at St. Louis to evaluate the revised G.R.E.A.T. Program. The outcome evaluation examines the extent to which G.R.E.A.T. is achieving these goals utilizing an experimental, multisite, longitudinal panel design implemented in seven cities across the continental United States. Preliminary analyses revealed six significant differences between the G.R.E.A.T. and non-G.R.E.A.T. students. Specifically, G.R.E.A.T. students compared with non-G.R.E.A.T. students reported:

- More positive attitudes toward police.
- Fewer positive attitudes about gangs.
- More use of refusal skills.
- More resistance to peer pressure.
- Lower rates of gang membership.
- Lower rates of self-reported delinquency.

These results are preliminary and reflect only short-term program effects, after just one year. They have not been peer-reviewed, nor have they been reviewed by the National Institute of Justice. An important question remains: Will these short-term program effects be sustained across time? The longitudinal design of the evaluation (i.e., surveying students annually for four years postprogram) will allow researchers to answer the question of whether the program has long-term effects on student attitudes and behavior. These results will not be available for several more years. A summary of the preliminary findings can be found here:

<http://www.iir.com/nygc/publications/2008-12-esbensen.pdf>.

The second new study evaluated CeaseFire, a Chicago-based violence prevention program. The program is administered by the Chicago Project for Violence Prevention (CPVP). CeaseFire focused on affecting risky activities by a small number of carefully selected members of the community, those with a high chance in the immediate future of either “being shot or being a shooter.” The program’s violence interrupters worked alone or in pairs on the street, mediating conflicts between gangs and intervening to stem the cycle of retaliatory violence that threatens to

break out following a shooting. Outreach workers counseled young clients and connected them to a range of services. First, the program aimed at changing operative norms regarding violence, both in the wider community and among its clients. CeaseFire also depends heavily on a strong public education campaign to instill in people the message that shootings and violence are not acceptable—and not approved of, even by peers. A second goal was to provide on-the-spot alternatives to violence when gangs and individuals on the street were making behavior decisions. Third, CeaseFire called for the strengthening of communities so they have the capacity to exercise informal social control and to mobilize forces, from businesses to clergy, residents and others, all working in concert to reverse the epidemic of violence. Chicago site operations were funded mainly by the state of Illinois, which channeled the money through the budget of the State Department of Corrections. Other major project supporters were the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance, the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health, and Cook County.

It appears that in four sites, the introduction of CeaseFire was associated with distinct and statistically significant declines in the broadest measure of actual and attempted shootings: declines that ranged from 17 percent to 24 percent in contrast with matched comparison areas. The analysis of crime hot spots contrasted shooting patterns before and after the introduction of CeaseFire. Overall, the program areas grew noticeably safer in six of the seven sites, and the evaluators concluded that there was evidence that decreases in the size and intensity of shooting hot spots were linked to the introduction of CeaseFire in four of these areas.

The study also considered how homicides within and among gangs changed with the introduction of the program, in contrast to short-term trends in the comparison areas. One statistical measure of interest was changes in the proportion of killings in an area attributable to gangs. By this measure, gang homicide density was down more in two program areas. A second measure was the proportion of gang homicides that were reciprocal in nature. That is, they were seemingly sparked by earlier killings. These incidents were a special focus of CeaseFire's violence interrupters. In four sites, reciprocal killings in retaliation for earlier events decreased more in the program beats than in the comparison areas. A third measure, average gang involvement in homicide, pointed to greater improvements in three of the areas.

All CeaseFire reports are available at the evaluator's organization:

<http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/ceasefire.html>.